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## **\$1.96 million grant a welcome boost to Māori-led lung cancer screening programme**

Waitematā DHB, Auckland DHB and University of Otago have today welcomed a \$1.96 million grant from the Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases (GACD) - via the Health Research Council.

The GACD grant will fund the first trial of lung cancer screening in Aotearoa, New Zealand. The trial will focus on Māori, whose mortality rates from the disease are up to four times higher than other ethnic groups. Around 450 Māori are diagnosed with lung cancer each year and approximately 300 die from it.

Early detection is vital to increasing the odds of survival. The trial, a collaborative effort between Otago University and the two DHBs, will screen up to 500 people at high risk of lung cancer, using low dose computerised tomography (LDCT) – a computerised x-ray that uses very small amounts of radiation to produce exceptionally clear three dimensional images to detect potentially cancerous nodules.

The trial will look into what method of invitation is most effective at getting people to a CT scan; either through a general practice clinic or a nurse-led central hub. Earlier survey work by the collaborative research team indicated there was a relatively even split in how people wanted to be invited.

Results from the two-year trial will help decide whether the programme is a viable long-term option for New Zealanders.

It follows a 2020 study led by University of Otago Associate Professor Sue Crengle (Waitaha, Kāti Mamoe, Kāi Tahu) to estimate the cost-effectiveness of LDCT screening in high risk populations.

“Our earlier work showed that a national screening programme of this nature is likely to be cost-effective for Māori, particularly Māori women, as well as for the total population of New Zealand,” Professor Crengle says. “Importantly, it shows that screening is likely to reduce population inequities relating to lung cancer among Māori. This funding will enable us to test that theory in very real terms.”

GACD funds joint programmes into lifestyle-related or chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers, lung diseases and mental health.

“Receiving funding from the GACD is highly prestigious,” Waitematā DHB CEO Dr Dale Bramley (Ngā Puhī, Ngāti Hine) says. “Success on this scale is an endorsement of the initiative that may very well save lives. Today’s announcement is another significant step forward in our drive to achieve equity.”

Waitematā DHB and Auckland DHB Director of Health Outcomes Dr Karen Bartholomew says around 75 per cent of early-stage lung cancers may be curable – if caught early enough. “The impact of screening could go a long way to eliminating the unacceptable inequities in mortality between Māori and non-Māori,” she says. “This is a Māori-led approach in collaboration with two DHBs who share a strong track record of screening and other interventions designed to support early detection and better health outcomes.”

**Ends.**

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